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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet presents guidelines for the improvement of the image of women in textbooks. General guidelines for the text and illustrations of textbooks are: (1) the actions and achievements of women should be recognized; (2) women and girls should be given the same respect as men and boys; and (3) abilities, traits, interests, and activities should not be assigned on the basis of male or female stereotypes. A section making recommendations for avoiding sexist language includes a discussion of various types of sexist language with suggested possible non-sexist alternative expressions. These recommendations, like the general guidelines, cover three areas: the omission of women, the demeaning of women, and sex-role stereotyping. It is also suggested that if an editor chooses to use selections that contain sexist attitudes, these attitudes should be discussed in accompanying descriptive material or discussion questions. (DI)

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Guidelines for

Improving the Image of Women in Textbooks

Scott, Foresman and Company

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**GUIDELINES FOR
IMPROVING THE IMAGE OF WOMEN IN TEXTBOOKS**

Scott, Foresman and Company

Sexism refers to all those attitudes and actions which relegate women to a secondary and inferior status in society. Textbooks are sexist if they omit the actions and achievements of women, if they demean women by using patronizing language, or if they show women only in stereotyped roles with less than the full range of human interests, traits, and capabilities.

Textbooks should treat women as the equals of men. Although in the past women were regarded as inferior, they were not and are not inferior people. The sexist attitudes of the past should not be reflected in current publications.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR TEXT AND ILLUSTRATIONS

The actions and achievements of women should be recognized.

The contributions of women to politics, the sciences, the arts, and other fields often thought of as being provinces of the male only should be presented and explored.

The works of female authors are too often omitted from anthologies. When compiling or revising such texts, editors should actively search for material written by women.

Females should be included as often as males in math problems, spelling and vocabulary sentences, discussion questions, test items, and other exercises. Very often the overall tone of a book is sexist because males are more frequently mentioned in exercises or because the exercises present only stereotypes.

Although many factors determine the contents of textbooks—authors, permissions, space, time, money, the market, etc.—these limitations should not be used to excuse bias, prejudice, or insensitivity.

Women and girls should be given the same respect as men and boys.

Writers, editors, designers, and illustrators should make sure that both male and female readers feel that a publication is directed to them.

While individual girls and women may be portrayed as comical, stupid, fearful, or followers of male initiative, such material should be scrutinized carefully in the context of the book as a whole to ensure that contempt for women as a group is not inadvertently being fostered. For example, writers should take care that a joke about a woman

who is a bad driver, a shrewish mother-in-law, financially inept, etc. does not present these qualities as typical of women as a group. Girls and women should not be shown as more fearful of danger, mice, snakes, and insects than boys and men are in similar situations.

Women and girls should not be shown as unworthy people when they do not conform to male standards. Males should not be viewed as having a monopoly on ability to judge what is interesting or worthwhile.

Although women are a majority of the American population, in many ways their history has been that of a minority group. Because of past discrimination, the same care must be taken in portraying women as in portraying blacks, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, American Indians, and other minorities.

**Abilities, traits, interests, and
activities should not be assigned on the
basis of male or female stereotypes.**

One reason often cited for the overwhelming percentage of selections by or about males in literature and language arts texts is that boys will read only stories about boys, whereas girls will read anything. If females were not depicted as passive, lackluster, sweet but senseless drudges, both boys and girls would find them more interesting. Few boys have rejected *Alice in Wonderland* or *The Wizard of Oz* because the main characters are girls.

Females as well as males possess courage, physical strength, mechanical skills, and the ability to think logically. Males as well as females can be fearful, weak, mechanically inept, and illogical. Females can be rude, intractable, active, or messy. Males can be polite, cooperative, inactive, or neat. Because such characteristics are shared by males and females in reality, textbooks that classify them as "masculine" or "feminine" are misrepresenting reality.

Both men and women should be shown cooking, cleaning, making household repairs, doing laundry, washing the car, and taking care of children. Both men and women

should be shown making decisions; participating in sports; writing poetry; working in factories, stores, and offices; playing musical instruments; practicing medicine and law; serving on boards of directors; and making scientific discoveries.

Children often conform to the standards of their peers because they fear ridicule. If only boys are encouraged to be active and competitive, girls with these inclinations may learn to stifle them. If only girls are encouraged to express openly such emotions as fear, sorrow, and affection, boys may feel reluctant to express these emotions.

Both men and women have much to gain from the elimination of stereotypes. Textbooks which avoid male and female stereotyping will more accurately represent reality, encourage tolerance for individual differences, and allow more freedom for children to discover and express their needs, interests, and abilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AVOIDING SEXIST LANGUAGE

The omission of women

Terms and titles which use "man" to represent humanity have the effect of excluding women from participation in various human activities. It is usually easy to find some other way of expressing the idea.

EXAMPLES OF SEXIST LANGUAGE:

early man; Neanderthal man; When man invented the wheel . . . ; *History of the Black Man in America*; *Man and His World*

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES:

early humans, early men and women; Neanderthals, Neanderthal men and women; When people invented the wheel . . . ; *History of Black People in America*; *World History*

Occupational terms often ignore the existence of women workers. Use terms that reflect the actual composition of a group.

EXAMPLES OF SEXIST LANGUAGE:

businessmen; congressmen; mailmen; repairmen; etc. when women are part of these groups

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES:

businessmen and women, business people; members of Congress, congressmen and women; mail carriers; someone to repair the . . .

Males are often chosen to represent "typical" examples, thereby excluding women from the reader's thoughts. There are many ways to include women in such examples.

EXAMPLES OF SEXIST LANGUAGE:

the common man, the man on the street; the man who pays a property tax; the typical American . . . he; the motorist . . . he

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES:

ordinary people; the person who pays a property tax, one who pays a property tax; typical Americans; motorists . . . they, the motorist . . . he or she

Wherever possible avoid the use of "he-him" referents. Substitute "he or she," "her or him," or a synonym for the noun. It is often preferable to use a plural sentence, followed by the pronoun "they."

The demeaning of women

Avoid constructions implying that women, because they are women, are always dependent on male initiative.

EXAMPLES OF SEXIST LANGUAGE:

The ancient Egyptians allowed women considerable control over property.

A slave could not claim his wife or children as his own because the laws did not recognize slave marriages.

the farmer and his wife; a homeowner and his family

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES:

Women in ancient Egypt had considerable control over property.

Slave men and women tried to maintain family relationships, but the laws did not recognize slave marriages.

a farm couple; homeowners and their children

Writers often judge women's achievements by standards different from those by which they judge men's. This is necessary in some professional sports where the same standards do not apply. However, in other areas one's sex does not affect one's competence. Therefore, writers should avoid constructions that place women in a special class. Words like "girl," "young woman," "woman," "lady," and "gal" often subtly denigrate women's achievements. They should be used only when their counterparts "boy," "young man," "man," "gentleman," and "guy" would be appropriate in referring to a male.

EXAMPLES OF SEXIST LANGUAGE:

Arthur Ashe is one of the best tennis players in America today, and Billie Jean King is one of the best women players.

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES:

Arthur Ashe and Billie Jean King are among the best tennis players in America today.

Arthur Ashe is one of the best male tennis players in America today, and Billie Jean King is one of the best female players.

Marie Curie did what few people—men or women—could do.

Mary Wells Lawrence is a highly successful woman advertising executive.

Marie Curie did what few people could do.

Mary Wells Lawrence is a highly successful advertising executive.

In some cases, it is necessary to refer to a woman's sex, as in the sentence: "The works of female authors are too often omitted from anthologies." However, if possible, the reference should be made with the aid of feminine pronouns, as in the sentence: "The doctor walked into the room and put her bag on a chair next to the patient's bed." Such terms as "woman doctor" or "female executive" are only acceptable where it is impossible or too cumbersome to indicate the person's sex by the use of pronouns.

A patronizing tone toward women must be avoided. References to a woman's appearance and family should be avoided unless it would be appropriate to refer to a man's appearance and family in the same context.

EXAMPLES OF SEXIST LANGUAGE:

lady professor; girl pilot; the ladies [unless "gentlemen" is also used], the fair sex, the weaker sex; the little woman; men (and women)

Galileo was the astronomer who discovered the moons of Jupiter. Marie Curie was the beautiful chemist who discovered radium.

The candidates were Bryan K. Wilson, president of American Electronics, Inc. and Florence Greenwood, a pert, blonde grandmother of five.

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES:

the professor . . . she, woman professor; the pilot . . . she, female pilot; women; the woman; men and women

Galileo was the astronomer who discovered the moons of Jupiter. Marie Curie was the chemist who discovered radium.

Galileo was the handsome astronomer who discovered the moons of Jupiter. Marie Curie was the beautiful chemist who discovered radium.

The candidates were Bryan K. Wilson, president of American Electronics, Inc. and Florence Greenwood, credit manager for Bloominghill's department store.

The candidates were Bryan K. Wilson, a handsome, silver-haired father of three and Florence Greenwood, a pert, blonde grandmother of five.

Sex-role stereotyping

Editors and authors should be cautious when they assign certain activities or roles to people purely on the basis of sex. Many such assumptions misrepresent reality and ignore the actual contributions of both sexes to the activity or role.

EXAMPLES OF SEXIST LANGUAGE:

In New England, the typical farm was so small that the owner and his sons could take care of it by themselves.

Children had once learned about life by listening to aunts, uncles, grandparents, and the wise men of their town or neighborhood.

Personal symbols are small, personal objects or possessions that have particular associations for their owner. To a woman, for example, a pressed flower might recall a dance she attended many years ago. A boy might keep a cracked baseball bat because it reminds him of the time he hit the winning home run.

Write a paragraph about what you expect to do when you are old enough to have Mr. or Mrs. before your name.

(Sample spelling exercises)

Al listened *patiently* to the ladies chatter.

The *ex-stenographer* got a job as a stewardess with an airline.

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES:

In New England, the typical farm was so small that the family members could take care of it by themselves.

Children had once learned about life by listening to aunts, uncles, grandparents, and the wise people of their town or neighborhood.

Personal symbols are small, personal objects or possessions that have particular associations for their owner. To a parent, for example, an old toy truck might serve as a reminder of a boy who has grown up. A girl might keep a broken tennis racket because it reminds her of a hard-won championship.

Write a paragraph about what you would like to do when you grow up.

Al listened *patiently* while the women talked.

The *ex-stenographer* got a degree in accounting.

Care must be taken to avoid sexist assumptions and stereotypes in teachers' manuals and other teacher aids.

EXAMPLES OF SEXIST LANGUAGE:

Hammers and scissors are good eye-hand coordinators. Hitting the nail instead of the thumb is a triumph for the boys. Cutting out paper dolls and their garments is good for the girls.

The boys like action stories, and both boys and girls like animation and comedy. Girls will read stories that boys like, but the boys will not enjoy "girlish" stories.

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES:

Hammers and scissors are good eye-hand coordinators. For a child, hitting the nail instead of the thumb or cutting out a recognizable shape is a triumph.

Most children like action, animation, and comedy in stories. Some children, however, will enjoy lighter or more sentimental types of reading materials.

If, after careful consideration, an editor finds it desirable to use selections that contain sexist attitudes, these attitudes should be discussed in accompanying descriptive material or discussion questions. Otherwise the text will convey to the reader the impression that sexism is socially acceptable, rather than a form of prejudice or a lack of sensitivity.
